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SUBJECT: FM OSKANIAN ON PUTIN'S GABALA STATION MISSILE
DEFENSE PROPOSAL

Classified By: Steve Banks, Pol/Econ chief, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) Several Armenian media outlets quoted Foreign Minister Oskanian's comments on the Gabala idea during his interview on Kentron television. Oskanian commented that he saw no physical danger to Armenia from the proposed project, noting that the facility would only be a radar station, not an interceptor launch site. Oskanian said that there would be risks to Azerbaijan from such a proposal, and said "if we (Armenia) received such a proposal, I would recommend the president and government turn it down, as it can make the country vulnerable." He also opined that such an arrangement would make Azerbaijan into a "playing card" in the hands of Russia and the United States, while worsening Azerbaijan's relations with Iran, as "the USA does not conceal that all this is aimed against Iran." He did concede the possibility that the proposal could create a political disadvantage for Armenia, and said the government was studying the implications. Overall, the issue got only moderate play in local media, with Oskanian's remarks on the subject picked up by Mediamax, Noyan Tapan, and Arminfo electronic news services, and by the Respublika Russian-language newspaper.

12. (C) During his lunch with MCC Ambassador Danilovich, Oskanian echoed the same themes on the Gabala idea. He suggested that Azerbaijani FM Mammedyarov -- who was "excited, just at the mention" of the possibility -- had gloated to Oskanian a little bit in St. Petersburg on the margins of the Minsk Group discussions, "thinking I would be jealous." Oskanian said he had also told Mammedyarov Armenia would not take such an opportunity if it were offered. Oskanian said he thought that the idea would be unhelpful in the broader context of regional stability and militarization of the Caucasus. He said that Iran would consider the plan a "hostile act."

13. (C) Oskanian conveyed an attitude of unconcern, dismissing the likelihood that this Gabala element would ever be brought to fruition. He cited a Financial Times article (we presume the June 7 piece headlined "Putin Calls US Bluff with Base Offer") in pointing out that the Gabala proposal may not fit geographically with the proposed system, and in any case is more about Russian posturing than a serious concept.
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